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JAPAN SAYS IT WILL KEEP TO PLEDGE TO HELP SOUTHEAST ASIAN ECONOMIES

By: Tan Hock Guan

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 17 (Bernama) -- Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi today gave a commitment that Tokyo will keep to its pledge to provide financial assistance to Southeast Asian countries hit by the economic crisis.

Obuchi made the commitment during a meeting with Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, one of several bilateral meetings the Malaysian Prime Minister held with leaders of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) economies gathered here for the Apec Summit.

Briefing reporters after the meetings, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Dr Mahathir expressed the hope that the assistance that Japan had pledged to provide Malaysia would be expedited.

However, certain procedures needed to be observed when providing the assistance, including carrying out assessments on the projects and programmes for which the aid was required, said Abdullah.

Japan promised a US\$1.8 billion aid to Malaysia when Dr Mahathir visited Tokyo recently. Tokyo has also announced a US\$30 million package to restore the economies of Southeast Asian countries.

Abdullah said the US\$1.8 billion aid was separate from the US\$30 billion aid, and Malaysian appreciated both packages.

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